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**SPEECH BY DR NG ENG HEN, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE NATIONAL YOUTH ACHIEVEMENT AWARD PRESENTATION CEREMONY ON FRIDAY, 9 APRIL 2010 AT 10.00AM AT KAKI BUKIT CENTRE (PRISON SCHOOL)**

Professor Leo Tan, Chairman of National Youth Achievement Award Council

Mr Teo Tze Fang, Acting Director of Prisons

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It gives me great pleasure to join you this morning at the National Youth Achievement Award Presentation Ceremony. Since its inception in 2000, a total of 960 young offenders have received the National Youth Achievement Award. This morning, I am honoured to present Silver and Bronze Awards as well as Certificates of Achievement to 94 more young men and women. Congratulations to all of you!

2. In Singapore, there is a strong belief that we should provide opportunities to all through good education and training. Each year, thousands of students work hard and we celebrate with them when they achieved good progress in their studies. In a perfect world, there would be a happy outcome for every child here. But in reality, people make mistakes and take wrong turns that land them in trouble. The consequences of their mistakes take a heavy toll especially when they are young with a future blighted if they cannot pick themselves up. The National Youth Achievement Award (NYAA) Programme aims to do just that – to help young offenders pick themselves up. It rightly places a strong emphasis on values and life-skills – an emphasis which MOE also wants across our schools. Now in its ninth year, the Programme has been instrumental in helping the young inmates of

Reformative Training Centre, Changi Women's Prison and Kaki Bukit Centre (Prison School), to develop key attributes of self-reliance, perseverance and, more importantly, a sense of responsibility.

3. The NYAA programme has the potential to change lives and give hope by helping young offenders use their skills, talents and knowledge to contribute meaningfully to society and our nation. To achieve its goals, the efforts of many are required. Young offenders are a particularly susceptible group. They need early intervention, guidance and support. I am therefore heartened to see so many organisations coming forward over the years, to show their commitment and dedication in supporting the NYAA Programme facilitated by the Singapore Prison Service.

4. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the National Youth Achievement Award Council, the Singapore Adventurers' Club, All Saints Home (Tampines), the Lions Club of Singapore Tanah Merah, Zion Home for the Elderly, New Horizon Centre (Toa Payoh), Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organising Committee (SYOGOC), Handball Federation of Singapore and the numerous individual volunteers for their continuous support of the programme. Your contributions are indeed greatly appreciated.

5. We need to connect with NYAA participants in ways which engage and inspire them. They need role models that they can admire and want to emulate. This year sailing Olympian, Mr Tan Wearn How, was invited to share with the NYAA participants on the Olympic Movement. The Olympic Values of 'Excellence, Friendship and Respect' as well as the Olympic Motto, "Citius, Altius, and Fortius", which translates to swifter, higher, stronger, were introduced to the NYAA

participants. Mr Tan also shared his experiences in representing Singapore in the 2004 Olympic Games as well as his struggles and challenges as an athlete, and how he managed to persevere and eventually win awards at the Southeast Asian Games. I am certain that the participants have benefited from the sharing, and I hope that they would internalise and practise these values in their daily lives.

6. To the parents and families who are present today, I thank you for your presence and strong support. You should be proud of your loved ones' achievements today. Your acceptance and unyielding encouragement are an integral driving force, crucial in helping them to adjust and reintegrate into society.

7. For example, I hope everyone here takes a leaf from Muhammad Irfan Bin Mohamed Gani, an alumnus of the NYAA Programme, who is here with us today to share his experience and how NYAA shaped him. His determination to succeed against all the challenges that he had faced is truly commendable. His five-year sentence in Kaki Bukit Centre did not stop him from sitting for the O and A levels. I am glad that he has decided to pursue his Diploma in Multimedia and Infocomm Technology at the Nanyang Polytechnic. I am also happy that NYP has given him an opportunity to make good. He has a bright future waiting for him and I wish him well. The same goes for Ong Kerven. He has proven that an ex-offender can reintegrate into society as long as they are given the opportunity and are willing to prove their resolve. In addition to academic achievement, the experience in Kaki Bukit Centre has helped Kerven to gain numerous life-skills which have spurred him to now counsel others in situations similar to what he went through before.

8. To the NYAA award recipients, I encourage you to take inspiration from Irfan and Kerven. I would like you to remember that by attaining this award, you have

proven to everyone, and more importantly yourselves, that you can achieve great things when you put your mind to it. The road ahead would not be an easy one, but I am confident that the skills and knowledge that you have acquired will prepare you well when faced with future challenges. I also hope that the award has motivated you to stay out of prison for good and lead useful lives as contributing members of the society. On this note, I congratulate you once again and wish you every success in your future endeavours.

9. Thank you.

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